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Believing Veraciously

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1. Introduction

The reflections roughly outlined in this text are based on an existential experience. After a childhood and youth as a fundamentalist Christian I fell into a great religious crisis in the course of questions concerning a moral conflict. This ultimately resulted in the loss of specious certainties taken for granted before. What my life had meant until then suddenly appeared to be like a mere fiction. Thereupon my conviction began to gravitate towards an atheistic materialism in the sense of nineteenth century's physics. However, the challenge by quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity led me to an intensive study of epistemic problems. This turn was partly caused by stumbling upon the so-called radical constructivism (which is not to be confused with the constructivism of the Erlangen school), in the course of reading a classic book about systemic psychotherapy¹ Yet, I immediately found it quite remarkable how rarely and if at all, then often only superficially most of its proponents pointed to the fact that this theory of knowledge was consequently to be regarded as a

¹ Watzlawick, Paul; Beavin, Janet H.; Jackson, Don D.; *Pragmatics of Human Communication*, W. W. Norton & Company. Inc: New York 1967.

construction itself, even though circular reasoning is discussed very extensively by constructivists otherwise.² Another important epistemological approach, the critical rationalism of Karl Popper,³ in my opinion also suffers from a deficiency in self-reflection, particularly owing to an unjustified denial of all elements with an inductive character.⁴

Albeit I do not believe that any method suggested so far in order to approximate truth can be trusted under all circumstances, I reject the total anarchism proposed by Paul Feyerabend.⁵

The conclusions, presented in the following parts of this text, are justified by their inherent, self-consistent principles and ultimately arose from at least seemingly personally encountered, critically balanced experiences. During all considerations in this context the reflection on the consequences regarding religious, ethical, and socio-political aspects was most important to me.

² e.g.: Watzlawick, Paul (Ed.); *The Invented Reality*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.: New York/London 1980.

³ Popper, Karl R.; *In Search of a Better World*, Revised ed., R. Routledge: London/New York 1995.

⁴ Popper, Karl R.; *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Routledge Classics: London/New York 2002.

⁵ Feyerabend, Paul; *Against Method*, 3rd ed., Verso: London 1993.

2. What do I really know?⁶

After the collapse of my religious world view and the indefensibility of an intermediate naïve materialism as a result of modern physics a general uncertainty overwhelmed me. Who guarantees that the newer theories, which partly seem to contradict the so-called common sense, are not false too?

On the one hand, I simply have to believe a lot of the experimental findings published by scientists and other experts and have to accept prefabricated interpretations, since I lack the means, time, etc. to examine them thoroughly myself. In many cases, technical achievements or my personal experiences indicate a certain credibility of the alleged "facts". However, against some claims, for example in connection with the theory of relativity, I do have reservations.

On the other hand, even one's own sensory perception is often not to be trusted. In this context, I particularly was fascinated by a simple arrangement in a technical museum, which was shown in a special exhibition several years ago. It mainly consisted of an inside illuminated wooden grey-blue painted box with two peepholes and a bigger hole, through which one could insert the right hand. The left eye glanced directly at a shrill-colored cartoon character on the otherwise

⁶ cf. Nagel, Thomas; *What Does It All Mean?* Oxford University Press, Inc.: New York/Oxford 1987.

monotonous back wall, while the view of the right eye was directed to the empty grey-blue right-sided wall of the box by a mirror arranged at an angle of 45 degrees. Strangely enough, while looking simultaneously with both eyes, it was not perceivable, that the visual image of the cartoon was not getting into the right eye. But I was even more astonished, when I held my right hand through the hole into the box, directly to the spot, at which I looked via the mirror with my right eye. As long as the hand was kept quiet, it was not visible. But when it was moved, the bright cartoon disappeared from the field of vision, and the hand emerged in its place. After stopping my hand's movements, it was displaced by the mentioned cartoon character again. The phenomenon (called binocular rivalry) was reproducible without any problems and made a stronger impression on me than countless other examples of optical illusions, effects associated with the blind spots, etc., which are widely known.

There are many other experiments dealing with the sense of hearing, temperature sensation, and so on, which also show that one's own perceptions can not be fully trusted. The epistemological radical constructivism mentions, in addition to physiologically induced distortions of the human perception, cognitive illusions, which purely arise from our mental constitution or social integration. In this context, phenomena such as self-fulfilling prophecies would occur. Retrospectively most of

us find or at least believe to be able to find corresponding occurrences. Everything, we think to know about the external world, were ultimately a construction of our cognitive apparatus. Without its instrumentality we wouldn't have any access to reality. With recourse to the evolutionary theory, according to which all living creatures, including men, were formed only by accidental mutations and a selection effected by circumstances in their habitats, the radical constructivism postulates that the cognitive apparatus of human beings does not necessarily furnish a true image of reality, but only a construct, which had proved to be sufficient within the previous history of the tribe. In particular, if mankind, with the aid of technical achievements created by itself, would venture into areas that its ancestors never were confronted with, a failure of the natural power of imagination would be conceivable. This obviously applies to the microcosm of quantum phenomena, which contradict our intuitive worldview.⁷ In contrast to constructivism, which is based on empirical findings, critical rationalism suggested that a purely logical axiomatic set of instruments should be used for the further development of science.⁴ Particularly the criterion of falsifiability should be considered as being at least nearly independent of observations, insofar as it is

⁷ cf. e.g. Rae, Alastair; Quantum Physics: Illusion or Reality? 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press: New York 1986/2004.

based on consequences of theories, which should be derived in a logical deductive way from those theories and feature a testable observability. However, later the whole method was interpreted as a continuation of the "cultural selection" postulated within "evolutionary epistemologies".⁸ Popper attributed the origin of scientific theories to the realm of fortuitousness and demanded their selection by testing their suitability⁹ with regard to intersubjectively accepted basic statements (which are in practice, in opposition to Popper's doctrine normally not "arbitrarily" stipulated⁴ but simply gained "a posteriori").

Thomas Kuhn pointed out that in the past old epistemes or paradigms exhibited quite a great persistence and were often only replaced by functionally more successful ones in the course of revolutionarily natured changes. Imre Lakatos discussed the practice of "research programs". According to his concept the hard core of established theories is like a backdrop, in front of which any additional hypothesis must assert its claims. In case of emerging inconsistencies it is usually attempted to

⁸ cf. Riedl, Rupert; *Biology of Knowledge: The Evolutionary Basis of Reason*, 3rd German ed. translated by Foulkes, P.; John Wiley & Sons: Chichester/New York 1984.

⁹ cf. Popper, Karl R.; *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*, Revised ed., Oxford University Press Inc.: Oxford/New York 1979.

stick to the basic ideas by means of changing auxiliary assumptions, etc. (i.e. "immunization strategies").¹⁰

Popper himself admitted that the application of the formalism of falsification does not lead to definitive decisions, even in the case of a contradictory experimental finding.¹¹ From a purely logical point of view a statement of the form: "For every x y is valid" has to be refuted, if for any individual x can be shown that y does not hold. However, in practice, problems may arise with respect to x or y . A famous, but with respect to the history of science only fictional example is the hypothesis: "All swans are white", which is refuted by the discovery of a single black or otherwise colored swan. To avoid a self-immunization, of course, the color must not be specified in the definition of the term "swan". Let us suppose that for a long time no non-white swans had been found. But then a black avian species was classified taxonomically as a swan by experts on the basis of extremely detailed investigations of the phenotype, and the "all-white hypothesis" was declared

¹⁰ cf. Losee, John; A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science, 4th ed., Oxford University Press Inc.: New York 2001.

¹¹ cf. Popper, Karl R.; The Logic of Scientific Discovery, Routledge Classics: London/New York 2002. Popper not only mentions the possibility of more or less justified ad-hoc hypotheses, but explicitly acknowledged the problems with definitions or the reliability of the seemingly falsifying observations.

to be falsified. In the course of subsequent molecular-genetic comparisons, however, it turned out that those birds were by no means to be assigned to the species of swans.¹² The fictitious scenario shows that a falsification can be falsified, because the judgment concerning x or the definition of y can be inadequate.¹³

In fact, an eminent real historical example exists for the falsification of a falsification, namely in the case of the particle theory of light, which seemed to be disproved irretrievably by diffraction, interference at a double slit, etc. Nevertheless, in a certain sense it was rehabilitated by Einstein in his explanation of the photo effect.¹⁴ Thus, in contrast to many improperly abridged expositions of Popper's theses, not even negative certainties can be

¹² Actually, there are molecular-genetical concerns not in the case of black swans, but the white coscoroba swan, which also displays some peculiarities in the phenotype (cf. German article about "Swans" at <https://de.wikipedia.org>).

¹³ In the following we will see that the criterion of falsifiability usually depends on auxiliary hypotheses, which also might cause problems. By the way, falsifying statements in my opinion do not only depend on possibly erroneous empiric observations in the narrower sense, but also on additional assumptions, e.g. that the observation is not altered by other unknown or neglected effects. A white swan, for instance, would look red colored, if there is an incidence of red light.

¹⁴ cf. Young, Hugh D.; University Physics, 8th Ed., Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc.: Reading, Massachusetts 1992.

obtained about reality. The particle theory of light is a particularly noteworthy example, since here the refutation by the observed wave properties appeared to be practically unchallengeable. Of course one could regard the so-called wave-particle duality as a strange immunization and the classical corpuscular theory as still refuted.¹⁵ However, it should be noted that the ascertained wave properties from a reasonable point of view at the end of the nineteenth century "logically" seemed to exclude many particle properties, which the light possesses demonstrably nevertheless. Therefore, I do not believe that specific feasible means of falsifiability¹⁶ (which must be distinguished from an actual falsification, based on, according to Popper, unexceptionally unsure basic statements) – that this means of falsifiability really can be evaluated almost always "with purely logical tools and therefore nearly infallibly "¹⁷ (apart from some few controversial cases).

¹⁵ From an assumable stance quantum objects could be regarded as something that is neither a "genuine" wave nor a "genuine" particle. Therefore one could oppose the usage of those terms in this context.

¹⁶ If one can not tell at least one concrete way (or several options leaving assuredly at least one way) for the implementation of an alleged falsifiability, there is no point to speak of a given falsifiability with respect to a certain hypothesis at all.

¹⁷ cf. Popper, Karl R.; Logik der Forschung, 7. Auflage, J.C.B.

This doubting objection questions the role of falsifiability within the critical rationalism, namely, as a "logical demarcation" between scientific and non-scientific statements. In my opinion circumstances, which can lead to the falsification of a theory can normally hardly be predefined in a comprehensible, not arbitrary manner, without any empirical foundations. The criteria of falsifiability often form something like "auxiliary theories" about certain aspects of a theory, which are not necessarily a deductively derivable part of the hypothesis in question. They need to prove their suitability and are therefore subject to fallibility themselves.¹⁸

Even the vague hope that a theory, which has a more extensive scope or agrees better with available

Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen 1982, Anhang XIV. (English version of this appendix?)

¹⁸ cf. Popper, Karl R.; *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Routledge Classics: London/New York 2002. Popper is a little bit unclear in his argumentation, as for a sufficient falsification he explicitly demanded a reproducible "low-level empirical hypothesis", which in turn needs to be supported by corroborating basic statements. Aren't those "low-level hypotheses" not something like "low-level hypothetical theories", as I objected above? Mustn't we accept their adequacy for being used as a testing criterion at least preliminarily in a guessing manner in order to be able to perform a falsification trial?

experimental observations than other hypotheses, should be closer to the truth, doesn't need to be fulfilled stringently. That this might be likely¹⁹ certainly can not be inferred honestly from existing limited empirical data about scientific history without using a (perhaps not explicitly formulated, but only intuitive) induction hypothesis. If one tries to predict the comparative reliability of different theoretic models in future, which always might bring unforeseeable surprises, one should never lose sight of the prejudice character of this approach. So, inevitably an immeasurable bias inheres in all scientific statements.

Ubiquitous accidental or even unnoticed systematic errors of measurement or other mistakes occur, and new theories adapted to them, thus can differ further from reality than their predecessors.

Fitting a curve to experimental data points may lead to the situation that in one section a redrafted mathematical function (as an example for a descriptive model) yields a more accurate match (e.g. measured in the sum of the distance squares), but that a formerly established expression provides a better data coverage over a larger

¹⁹ cf. Popper, Karl R.; Logik der Forschung, 7. Auflage, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck): Tübingen 1982, Anhang XV. (English version of this appendix?) or Popper, Karl R.; Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Revised ed., Oxford University Press Inc.: Oxford/New York 1979.

area, which got experimentally accessible only later. Therefore, even in the case of formalized mathematical modeling, it may happen that an older model is better than an initially more correct looking one after the emergence of further experimental data. In this connection it must be taken into account that already existing data areas as well as the temporal development of the new experimental acquisitions are often random in history (caused by technical inventions, etc.). Besides, as already mentioned, measurement results are unavoidably error-prone to some extent, so that small deviations may always be due to this fact. It can only be ascertained, which of the given theories best describes the available observations. But this does not necessarily allow conclusions about their correct ranking with regard to their actual distance to the truth without prejudice.

Radical constructivists are more cautious, admitting that scientific theories may embrace the character of superstition.²

But I also consider logic and mathematics as constructs, whose application, despite their enormous intrinsic reliability, can sometimes mislead into pitfalls. Let us take the simple expression: $1 + 1 = 2$. In accordance with this abstraction, the mixture of 1 kg of water and 1 kg of ethanol yields 2 kg of mixture within the highest achievable measuring accuracy, even though the general theory of relativity postulates deviations due to a change in free enthalpy. However, the calculated

discrepancy currently lies far beyond the practically realizable detectability. If, on the other hand, 1 L of water is mixed with 1 L of ethanol, the volume of the mixture is slightly less than 2 L, what undoubtedly can be detected with relatively little effort. In the context of the masses, the equation $1 + 1 = 2$ fits to practical experiences, while in the case of volumes it does not necessarily. The objection, that a different liquid was added, is relative, since one mile of road is not completely identical with the next one, which extends the distance to two miles, and the two liquids in my example were only mixed without a chemical reaction. Besides, the addition rules were successfully applied to the masses. This is an example illustrating the meaning of a remark made by Einstein: 'As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain, and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.'²⁰ Yet, this does not take into account any further problems related to Kurt Gödel's incompleteness theorems, which even affect the certitude of some elements within the realm of pure mathematical issues.²¹

²⁰ Einstein, Albert; *Sidelights on Relativity*, Methuen & Co. Ltd.: London 1922. Of course, this does not mean that the occurring "mixing volume" can not be described adequately with a more complex mathematical model.

²¹ cf. Hofstadter, Douglas R.; Gödel, Escher, Bach: *An Eternal Golden Braid*, 20th AE, Basic Books, Inc.: New York 1979/1999

Irrespective of the metaphysical question whether mathematics also exists in some kind of way independently of intelligent beings quasi in the sense of Platonic idealism, real mathematics, with which I am confronted in daily life, appears to me as a human construction. Anyhow, its elaborated form is not entirely arbitrary. It is possible that previously neglected properties could be revealed in an interactive manner. For instance, the concept of natural numbers inevitably seems to lead to the appearance of primes and other regularities. Although the Euclidean geometry may not describe in a strictly correct way, what I experience as the so-called external world, it features "objective", inter-subjectively comprehensible, not arbitrary properties. This demonstrates that Paul Feyerabend's slogan "Anything goes" does not make the grade for overall reality.⁵ It seems as if even "spirits", which contingently we as human beings might have only called into existence, escaped our full control. Experienced limitations of arbitrariness are an important argument against an all-encompassing subjective relativism. By those boundaries I encounter something like a coercive "objectivity", which prompts me to take a proper attitude. However, the situation is more complicated than classical logic²² suggests. In its context, "the law of

²² cf. Salmon, Wesley C.; *Logic*, 2nd ed., Prentice Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs/New Jersey 1963/1973.

excluded middle" seems initially quite clear and true. A statement can only be true or false. Let's look at the sentence: "Paul is currently in the room next door." Paul either must be inside or not! But what, if Paul is standing on the doorstep, and a large part of his sturdy stature protrudes into the room, is he really inside then? Paul, taken as a whole, is not inside, would be a possible (previously per not quite unproblematic definition²³ stipulated) standpoint of the divalent logic. In the case of a quantum particle, however, according to currently accepted theories the assessment of the situation (keyword: delocalization due to uncertainty or superposition) can get additionally complicated.²⁴

²³ The definition that a person or thing must be completely inside a room in order to be considered as being present there would mean that a person staying in the threshold area between two rooms would be quasi "nowhere". If one demands that more than 50% of the body must be inside, the number of undefined states is reduced considerably, but there are still an infinite number of unclear constellations (different orientations and body-holdings) (at least from a classical physical perspective). The definition that a infinitesimal portion of the body reaching inside the room is sufficient for "staying in a room" leads to the simultaneous presence in two rooms for all those conditions, which were not assigned to any place of residence in the previous explication, but this seems to be more plausible in everyday life.

²⁴ cf. Zeilinger, Anton; *Dance of the Photons: From Einstein to Quantum Teleportation*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York,

Popper but also many radical constructivists advocate realism, that is, they are convinced of the existence of an ontologically independent objective external world.³

George Berkeley, on the other hand, refused to infer material entities from the perceived phenomena.²⁵ In his first meditation on the first philosophy René Descartes²⁶ quite generally questioned all seeming certainties. In the end it can not be ruled out that any of our experiences can be traced back to the deception of a malicious, cunning spirit with practically divine possibilities. However, in his second meditation Descartes thought that he had found a pivot, which was beyond all doubt, namely, that he, as a doubting thinker, could be sure of his own, in a very abstract way "substantial" existence. Yet, I can not quite understand the alleged indubitableness of the thesis, which in philosophical discussions is known under the slogan: "Cogito, ergo sum. - I think, therefore I am."²⁷ Thus the Buddha taught

2010.

²⁵ cf. Russell, Bertrand; *The Problems of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press: Oxford/etc. 1912/1998.

²⁶ Descartes, René; *Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies: A Latin-English Edition*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2013.

²⁷ To think that the actual process of thinking does not really happen, while at the same time it experiences itself as an "I" (maybe only in an illusionary manner), would have to be considered as performatively self-contradictory. (cf. Hintikka,

about meditative internal vision: "There are sensuous impressions, feelings, and thoughts, but an "I" (as a self, who experiences all this) is not tangible."²⁸ The subjective "I" experience is interpreted by him as an illusionary ephemeral event arising from the interaction of various factors (skandhas). In my personal experience the intimate "I" of the introspective approach is somewhat like a mirage. Hence, the justification of this concept consists at the moment only in the fact that sensuous impressions, feelings, and thoughts are appearing as if a being with an inner perceptual capacity combined with a body would exist in an external world, which in addition contains other beings with separate such inner worlds (i.e. consciousness). This impression, however, is not immune to deception (as, for example, is supposed by many doctrines of Eastern traditions), but leaves much room for speculations, which do not assume a metaphysically existing "I" in form of a "res cogitans", that is clearly distinguishable from a remaining, "slyly misleading" reality. (Even so, the

Jaako; Cogito, Ergo sum: Inference or Performance? In: Philosophical Review, Vol. 71, No. 1, Jan., 1962, 3–32.) But Descartes tries to infer a substance-like essence, which is not identical with the "genius malignus", from something that might perhaps be nothing more than a mere "occurrence", which arises by an interaction of certain phenomena.

²⁸ Bhikkhu Bodhi; In the Buddha's Words, 1st ed., Wisdom Publications, Inc.: Boston 2005.

definitive denial of a constant core of a person is a belief just as arbitrary as the contrary.)²⁹

Descartes' further deliberations seem to me still less tenable than his allegedly conclusive implication concerning a quasi-substantial "I", which metaphysically transcends the phenomenon of occurring experience. The idea that reality may only be like a dream is already found in the Chinese Taoist book of master Zhuang, who was no longer certain after waking up, whether he were Zhuang Zhou, who had dreamt to be a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming to be Zhuang Zhou.³⁰ It must be noted, however, that Descartes' doubts were of much more extensive scope in the beginning.

²⁹ Leaving open the possibility of a reincarnation of a "totally blank self essence" without any character dispositions, personal preferences etc. (which, let's say, might for example depend on a physical brain) – just the "rebirth" of a naked internal observer – would upgrade John Rawls' mere notional scenario of an "original state" behind a "veil of ignorance" (cf. Rawls, John; *A Theory of Justice*, Rev. ed., Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts 1999.) to a not completely excludable hypothesis. What would our world look like, if the powers that be would reckon with the conceivability of being reincarnated somewhere in the most disadvantaged regions, within unprivileged populations, or as livestock in factory farms?

³⁰ Zhuang, Zhou; *The Complete Works of Zhuangzi*: Translated by Burton Watson, Columbia University Press: New York/Chechester 1968/2013.

Inspired by the genre of science fiction more recent varieties of outer world skepticism have been developed, such as the thought experiment of Hilary Putnam about the possibility of actually being just a brain in a vat containing a life-sustaining liquid, connected to a manipulative computer providing electrical impulses, which generate deceiving sensations of a merely simulated reality.³¹ The idea of a virtual reality simulated by a super computer was also acted out in the movie "Matrix" a few years ago.³² In spite of the rather materialist-realistic elaboration of the "real reality" in these recent fantasies, they are productive insofar as they show that new variations about what could be behind our world of experience are always possible. Theoretically, an infinite number of scenarios are conceivable, apart from the infinity of even greater cardinality concerning something unimaginable beyond our intellectual capacity. That all this is not simply unfounded, as some critics of skeptical positions think, is revealed for instance by quantum mechanics, which suggests incredibly strange hypotheses about the world manifesting around us.⁷ The assertion that a possibly illusory character of our experienced world is irrelevant,

³¹ Putnam, Hilary; Reason, Truth and History; Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1981.

³² Baggott, Jim; A Beginner's Guide to Reality, Penguin Books Ltd.: London 2005.

as long as we are living within it, is also to be rejected (see Section 5 "Practical Consequences").

A fundamental change may be caused by a "natural law", with which we did not get acquainted yet, since it did not take any effect within the "universe" accessible to us hitherto. Beyond that, it is quite conceivable that we could "wake up" in a completely different reality in the next moment.³³ Indeed, although truly substantial arguments speak against such expectations, it may happen that suddenly a trumpet is blown and the final Day of Judgment is proclaimed.

A belief in the spirit of the nineteenth century's materialism is widespread especially among bio-scientists, such as Richard Dawkins,³⁴ who scarcely bothered themselves about the riddles and paradoxes of modern physics. But I think that this naïve approach is hardly more justified than other religious views.

³³ Since, as only just set out, there are an infinite number of possibilities, a pragmatic quotidian approach will be confined to inductive guesses based on previous temporal experience. But we always should keep this fact in our minds and incorporate it for example in ethical deliberations.

³⁴ Dawkins, Richard; *The God Delusion*, First Mariner Books Edition Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Company: New York 2006/2008. Dawkins does not really draw far reaching conclusions from the mysteriousness and queerness of quantum theory.

What is the consequence of these considerations? A total skepticism? Could such an opinion be advocated without self-contradiction? Mustn't it be dismissed, as it undermines its own claims? What does all this mean with respect to the "dos and don'ts" in the face of my preferences, desires, aversions, and fears, which I perceived in myself at the moment, but which might be completely altered in future? What does the intangibility of the "I" (in the sense of "self") mean in this context?

Since there is, strictly speaking, no complete inactivity, because even idle loafing around could be an action with consequences, I don't want to stay with mere unreflecting shrugging. However, without reliable knowledge, I can not preclude the possibility of making a choice, which I regret later. Perhaps, I am just squandering decisive opportunities for my future existence in a part of reality, which is completely impenetrable for me at the moment. So how could I make the best of my current situation?

3. What will be sustaining?

For further considerations, we shall first examine more in detail, how I had slid into the above-mentioned disconcertion at all. What gives and gave me cause for such wobbliness?

When I looked at my different convictions about the world and asked myself about their origin, I finally came to the conclusion that these are rooted in interpretations

of earlier experiences, which remain present in more or less detailed remembered sentiments and perceptions (in my case most intensively of visual nature). Therefore, I shall deliberately use experiences as the basis of my epistemology, even though Popper repeatedly criticized this as "psychologism".³⁵ In short, experiences, which are certainly not independent of my psyche,³⁶ are simply my access to the world and not an a priori defined logic. Interestingly, my recollections include experiences that certain unreliability inheres in sensory perceptions, but even more in those memory contents themselves. Nevertheless, even the most basic linguistic concepts such as tree, table, etc., which are actually constructs for the orientation in reality are usually derived from former interactions with other people. Expressions do not represent the (phenomenal) reality in the sense of a clear assignment. Rather, we are operating with "invented" mini-hypotheses about what is meant by others, for example by the word "tree". These hypotheses are linguistically connected with sensuous elements in our mind in such a way that even new individuals, which never before appeared in our life, can

³⁵ Be aware that Popper's usage of the term "Psychologism" is quite different from the common convention. cf. Popper, Karl R.; The Logic of Scientific Discovery, Routledge Classics: London/New York 2002 and the article about "Psychologism" at <https://en.wikipedia.org>.

³⁶ cf. e.g. the theses of radical constructivism in section 2.

be classified as a tree or non-tree. Precisely for this reason conceptual models contain a considerable ambiguity, which is normally only realized near thresholds.³⁷ Since this seems to be a necessary accompaniment to every empirically meaningful abstraction, even most precise science can not

³⁷ On this subject perhaps a little anecdote from my childhood: I can still recall the time when I could follow the adults' conversations only fragmentarily. Since cups for hot beverages such as coffee or tea in colloquial Austrian are commonly called "Häferl", I did not know the term "Tasse" (the standard German expression for "cup") for a long time. Saucers were usually used only on special occasions when guests were visiting us. For whatever reason had the word part "Unter" from "Untertasse" escaped my notice, and so I associated the word "Tasse" with saucers (Untertassen). I was quite embarrassed in the kindergarten when my mistake had been cleared up. At that time I was occupied with a further question of concept. In my neighborhood there were a few apple trees, which had almost no trunk, but already branched just above the ground. Besides, I knew about hazel bushes, which had practically the same feature. Why didn't the people call those small apple trees "apple bushes" or the hazel bushes small hazelnut trees? (In German small trees could be named "Bäumchen" so the actual controversy was about "Apfelbäumchen" and "Haselnusssträucher".) Since I received quite divergent answers to my query at that time of my boyhood, a consciousness of the relativity of concepts has taken root in my mind.

completely avoid certain ambiguities.³⁸ However, a "conceptual construct" in my mind can not only relate to trees or other elements of the sensorily accessible reality, but also to objects within imaginations, items of artistic concepts or parts of computer-generated virtual worlds. There are also terms that refer to something that has never appeared in our everyday world so far and of which we do not have concrete ideas, such as "aliens". Although it is not certain that such beings actually exist in what we experience as the "real external world", in my opinion we can say that the term refers to them, if extraterrestrial intelligent forms of life should somehow be part of our so-called "universe". In his work, quoted earlier, Putnam³¹ asserted that subjects belonging to brains in a vat, who are deceived by a supercomputer, so that they seem to live in a virtual world and who never had or would know anything else, would not be able to assume that such scenario could be applied to themselves without logical self-contradictions. However, I disagree. A subject of a brain in a vat musing about the "brain in a vat" scenario, would be aware that the vat, in which it could potentially be located would not be part of the questionable "reality", from which its sensory

³⁸ My point of view implies a rather nominalistic position with regard to the problem of universals. The Platonic but also the Aristotelian realism always looked a little bit fishy to me because of my childhood experiences.

impressions arise. If such a subject imagines a vat containing a brain connected to a manipulating computer, which generates a virtual world (whose status we might describe with "second-order virtuality" from our point of view), the mentioned subject would quasi map the imagined virtual world (of second-order virtuality) to its ostensible environment (which would we would consider to be only virtual from our stance) and assign the way of existence and the whereabouts of a hypothetical vat, in which its actual brain might perhaps float, to an extrapolated "more real" world. This extrapolation analogous to the previous mapping would be no less justified than our usage of the word "alien" for extraterrestrial unknown beings.

Perhaps, the meaning of the term "truth" might be understood in a similar way as a conceptual extrapolation from a cognitive construct, which derived from experiences with lies or errors and their opposites. At first from this construct a pragmatic concept of truth can be obtained, which seems to be applicable, for example, when a conversation partner states: "In front of the door is a yellow car", and my own sensory impressions support such a linguistic description. In the next step one might try to extend the "denotation" of this conceptual model of the term "truth" from the "perceived world" to "reality itself" (Kant's noumenal world). However, it is unclear, to what degree this is feasible for us humans, even if we actually had some possibilities for exploring the "world

as it is". After all, an adequate overall description of the experimental findings of modern physics in the twentieth century, already sometimes appears to exceed the abilities of human mind. As in the case of the wave-particle duality, which was accepted at least preliminarily by the majority of physicists, it could be that deeper approaches to reality will deliver only approximate descriptions of partial aspects (like e.g. the terms "wave" and "particle"), which taken together might appear quite paradoxical to human beings. These difficulties signify that our situation may be similar in many respects to that of brains in a vat³⁹ or even worse. There are several indications that "reality" deviates significantly from our perceptions.²⁴ Therefore Putnam's opinion that we cannot apply to ourselves alternatives to an almost naïve realism without conceptual contradictions is not useful. Nevertheless, perceptions themselves, even if they should have a deceptive character, are a partial aspect of the overall reality. Hence their conceptual representations are a partial aspect of "truth" with some reservations of course. As a human being, I am at least "blessed" with parts of the "truth", because it is true that "I experience the world as it presents itself to me in the form of an, albeit possibly illusory, subjective perspective." Therefore "knowledge" in the strictest sense of the word is limited to the current probably

³⁹ "Similar" just in the sense that reality is not, what it looks like.

distorted experience (as it manifests to me together with potentially erroneous interpretations, associations, memories, etc.). All "knowledge", which goes beyond these extremely wretched cognitions, bound to the current moment, is just a firmly held belief, which seems necessary for life and is treated merely pragmatically as quasi sure.⁴⁰ In this context, I would describe a radical "veraciousness" with a striving for an overall appropriate discerning attitude against one's total life experience. If this is accompanied by a particular attention to other truth-seeking people, so that the striving for this appropriate discerning attitude against experiences with the so-called reality gets comprehensible for them, "scientificity" may be ascribed to that endeavor, though without a practicable benchmark for its assessment.⁴¹

⁴⁰ With such strict criteria for the notion of "knowledge", the so-called "Gettier problem" is avoided. (cf. Gettier, Edmund L.; Is Justified True Belief Knowledge? *Analysis*, Vol. 23, No. 6, (June, 1963), pp. 121–123.) However, these rigorous justificatory conditions (for such a good justification of an opinion so that it can be considered as "knowledge" at all) would implicate that everybody is only able to assert a genuine claim of knowledge just against himself or herself, which in addition would be extremely limited.

⁴¹ Since I have not yet come across a truly convincing solution to the Gettier problem for the recognition of intersubjective knowledge, in my opinion no intersubjectively fully satisfying criteria could be established so far for scientificity, which

In struggling for an adequate response to the appearances, all living beings seemingly try to infer anticipations from analogies and similarities.⁴² This is by no means limited to rational thought in humans, but also applies to emotions, such as particularly anxieties, which are often triggered by unconscious subtleties resembling those of earlier experiences. Obviously, our ideas and expectations, without which we humans would not be able to manage our lives, are constructed from cumulatively accumulated processed, conscious, and (as shown by psychological experiments) unconscious impressions stored in our memories.⁴³ However, these constructions may contain arbitrary elements and be of any origin. Therefore, Popper seems to be right, when

essentially rests upon personal integrity. Besides fundamental epistemological problems concerning each single scientist, this is an additional reason, why the pragmatic institutional “science” is actually and necessarily based on beliefs. Although these are more or less just approved by convention (somehow in conformity with Popper’s view of the justification of “basic statements”), the individual scientist should only consent in accordance with an honest veraciousness as insinuated above (what Popper neglects for his paranoid fear of “psychologism”).

⁴² cf. Hume, David; *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, The Open Court Publishing Co.: Chicago 1921 or Russel, Bertrand; *The Problems of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Oxford University Press: Oxford/etc. 1912/1998.

⁴³ Kahneman Daniel; *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York 2011.

he denies a straightforward logical inductive method for the creation of scientific theories, which nonetheless are ultimately based on common sense.⁴⁴ Albeit, he completely disregards the inductive character of the interim acceptance and application of a theory that has proved successful so far. Since in this context the rationality of an at least preliminary further utilization of a hypothesis can only be inferred from past fruitful trials. In a nearly grotesque manner Popper goes through all sorts of contortions just to avoid the least concession on this point.⁴⁵ Without the hope that a limited number of trials might provide a useful criterion for the further treatment of a theory in future, without that hope, which

⁴⁴. Almost every living creature seems to try to learn from past experiences. Although this strategy, which inevitably implies a certain inductive character, has some already mentioned limitations, it broadly looks to work beneficially. If we are aware of the inherent uncertainty of induction and use it with appropriate caution, I think, we can be confident of being even more successful. Besides, I don't see any serious alternative. "Abduction", a term suggested by Peirce to denominate a logical form of inference besides induction and deduction, seems to me to be of no advantage for describing the creation of new hypotheses, either. cf. Fann, K. T.; Peirce's Theory of Abduction, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers: The Hague, Holland 1970.

⁴⁵ It is not a question of compromising Popper's partly precious contributions, but of making clear that it simply is impossible to get along without any inductive elements.

is quasi inferred from epistemic experiences in the history of science "inductively",⁴⁶ there is no reason to demand such a practice. The proposal, to consider potentially falsifying "basic statements" as more or less mere "conventions", exhibits an overdoing dogmatism, indeed, a whimsical avoidance of induction⁴⁷ (as well as an absurd contempt for experiences, which are admittedly subject to subjective psychological phenomena).

As already discussed, the method of falsification can not create any negative certainty because both, the basic statements used for the refutation and the criteria of falsifiability, can prove to be deficient later on. Nevertheless, the recommendation on testing existing theories occasionally by means of empiric trials seems

⁴⁶ The term "inductive" is here as elsewhere in this text to be understood in the sense of "generalized from a limited number of existing experiences (especially with regard to the future, but in some cases also to analogues or similarities)".

⁴⁷ cf. Footnote 18. Besides, in serious research practice the "reproducibility" of experiments is definitely considered to be a prerequisite for being used in the generation of commonly accepted, potentially falsifying basic statements. Normally this "reproducibility" is provisionally assumed in an inductive manner on the basis of a limited number of successful repetitions in order to get a provisional corroboration or as limited experience teaches a more reliable but still provisional falsification of a hypothesis.

to be quite justifiable. The "apology" for trusting in the usefulness of this practice results from attentively scrutinized experience. On the one hand it is wise, to continually check and, if necessary, to revise hypotheses, because of their near relation to prejudices. On the other hand a later refutation of a temporarily accepted falsification occurs fairly rarely. Sure enough, in such a case the original hypothetical models usually require an adaptation, even if certain core statements have been rehabilitated.⁴⁸ Experiences with the experienced "error-proneness" of experiences "quasi-inductively" advice a critically cautious attitude. So there is certainly a circle,⁴⁹ which gains legitimacy from

⁴⁸ It is one of Popper's merits that he has pointed out the asymmetric reliability between corroboration and falsification. But the belief in this asymmetry, which isn't as rigorous as in "classic pure logic", is justified empirically in an inductive manner by limited historic experience and not by logical axioms so far. Even if a weaker asymmetry might be explained within certain logical systems, Einstein's objection against an unconditional empirical applicability of mathematics analogously would have to be considered in that case either (cf. footnote 20).

⁴⁹ To attempt a complete and sound justification of the described circular procedure, leads only deeper into the so-called "Münchhausen trilemma". (cf. Albert, Hans; *Treatise on Critical Reason*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey 1985.) While testings of the circular self-declaration of the here presented epistemological approach might be continued till the end of the world or more precisely till the end

precisely those experiences, which supports the cautious attitude, even if generalizations, which led to its formation, are neglected in the context of its justification. Of course, the hypothesis of the hypothetical character of all concepts about an only partly self-disclosing phenomenal reality can not deny its own nature of being a prejudice itself. Therefore, the idea, that our understanding of reality is a construct, is such a thing itself. Consistently, this epistemological hypothesis is subject to its own demand for perpetual critical inquiry

of mankind, of course sensibly only, if no empirically based convincing suggestions for better alternatives are found – in other words – while the final judgment about the whole procedure is still missing, the preliminary acceptance of the entire methodology inevitably forms a dogmatic leap into faith. But even the finding that the resulting critical empiricism, combined with a "hypothetical metaphysical agnosticism" seems to be proving ad interim in the face of experience could be based on a deceiving self-fulfilling prophecy. So there is no "ultimate justification". As a proponent of this empirically critical, metaphysically agnostic attitude, I can only point out that I am striving for a "veraciousness", which seemed to be mostly appropriate to all my life's experiences so far. It is an attempt to believe as honestly as possible, while being fully conscious that the basically accepted fundamental ignorance is also a presumption. One can only appeal to other persons, to compare this hypothesis with alternatives by means of their own experience. It hardly seems possible to do more, as well as in similar situations concerning ethical questions.

and must be understood as an important preliminary judgment in the context of a comprehensive interpretation of world and reality, as a creed derived from experience, which seems rational as long as, despite honest search, no better alternatives are found. In contrast to an apodictic skepticism, the self-referencing of the skeptical belief described here does not lead to any problematic contradictions and therefore does not need solutions like Russell's type theory etc.⁵⁰

To address desires for a method one might regard my position as a working hypothesis. An exemplary formulation could be outlined as follows:

Attempts to draft universal laws about the observed phenomenal reality and to employ them cautiously on expectations in the future are advantageous provided that experiences with the occasional failure of this strategy is acknowledged, inasmuch as hypotheses, thus obtained, are attributed a certain prejudice character. Wherever possible the theories themselves and all deducible consequences have to be subject to constant demanding examination. Indeed, the tests deliberately should regularly try to go to the limits of their efficiency (e.g. by using new artificial experimental settings that do not occur in every day life).

In accordance with Popper the laws formulated in this context are not at all restricted to generalizations of

⁵⁰ cf. article about "Russell's paradox" at <https://en.wikipedia.org>.

observed regularities. They might also be created by free associations emerging from the subconscious or the use of creative, almost artistic fantasies. Theses obtained in a completely incomprehensible manner are acceptable too, as long as they empirically prove to be superior to competing others.

In order not to complicate our lives unnecessarily, from rivaling theories, which are equally successful, we should prefer that one, which comprises the least or least important amount of empirically untested implications. This rule, known as “Occam’s razor”,⁵¹ is a pragmatic recommendation, but does not necessarily correlate with verisimilitude.⁵² Although we should avoid drifting into excessive speculations, a certain extent of unsure metaphysical assumptions is inevitable.

In fact, possible alternative transcendental scenarios should always be kept in mind or even actively concocted, not only with respect to ethical or religious questions, but also for the purpose of a general preservation of openness towards radically different

⁵¹ cf. Article about “Occam’s razor” at <https://en.wikipedia.org>.

⁵² When some atheists use this “razor” to defend some sort of naturalistic realism as the only rational point of view, this constitutes a severe abuse of that recommendation. As a bad example cf. e.g. Hitchens, Christopher; *God is not great*, Warner Books, Inc.: New York 2007.

approaches. This could be quite helpful, if one scientifically has reached an impasse.⁵³

Of course, my epistemological working hypothesis can only be regarded as advisable in everyday practice as long as it proves to be better than alternatives according to the same principle, which it applies to the evaluation of all hypotheses.

Instead of a "hypothetical realism"⁵⁴ I suggest a "hypothetical agnosticism concerning all metaphysical aspects", which originates from a "critical empiricism", which in turn is supplemented as well as limited by a "truly critical rationalism"⁵⁵ and by a very cautious "critical pragmatism", whereby the term "critical" is to be understood as: "incessantly in a pondering and restricting manner questioned".

⁵³ cf. Albert, Hans; *Treatise on Critical Reason*, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey 1985, „Construction and Criticism: Theoretical Pluralism“, where Albert imputes a vital role to an incessant search for alternative metaphysical frames of reference in the context of facilitating the creation of new theories.

⁵⁴ cf. Vollmer, Gerhard in: Radnitzky, Gerard; Bartley, W. W. (Eds.); *Evolutionary Epistemology, Rationality, and the Sociology of Knowledge*, Open Court Publishing Company: Peru, Illinois 1987.

⁵⁵ In practice my proposal is not so far from Popper's fallibilist approach, but pretty surely he would have rejected such a "kinship" obstinately, nonetheless.

4. Influenced freedom?

At the moment psychology and neurosciences suggest that all mental processes are represented in the brain, and physico-chemical events in the cerebral matter in turn affect the subjective, conscious experience (obviously, for instance, in the case of sometimes massively influencing drugs, etc.).

Whether certain physical processes are just accompanied by mental phenomena, or immaterial events are quasi only seemingly reflected in an illusory material mirage, or any other constellation is true, is an idle speculation at the moment. However, a decision of this metaphysical controversy is not as important as some people think for the discussion of the so-called problem of "free will", but only becomes fully relevant when considering our fate after death.

Given the concept of causality, which is fundamental for human orientation in the world, but which can only be inductively gathered from the experience of at least ostensible rules within the phenomenal reality,⁴² the following is to be considered: Either an act of volition has any reason or cause⁵⁶ (in the most general sense of a

⁵⁶ Some people demand that "reason" and "cause" have to be sharply discriminated. From such a point of view, for example, a physically intangible "hate of a person" is the reason for a murder, while the somatic "emotion of hate", which also manifests in corresponding neural patterns of excitement and

relation to other events within the whole realm of being, which perhaps might not be restricted to natural phenomena), for instance: previous experiences; inherited traits; external triggers; an accidentally amplifying sequence of events in the brain, such as an electrical stimulus by an ionizing radioactive decay within the body; inspirations of divine or other transcendental origin;⁵⁷ karmically induced personal tendencies dating

cross-linkings, constitutes a part of the (physical) causal chain of murderer's actions. However, in everyday language, but also in many philosophical texts, the border between the two concepts is quite indistinct. Although, of course there are cases, in which only one of these terms appears to be meaningful. Thus, for example, a thoroughly elaborated mathematical proof might be qualified as a justification and therefore its content as a reason for a certain theorem, but not as its cause. Conceivably the remote connection between entangled particles differs analogously from a classical cause-effect relation. cf. Ma, Xiao-song et al.; Experimental delayed-choice entanglement swapping, *Nature Physics* 8, 479–484 (2012), doi:10.1038/nphys2294. Nonetheless, even highly abstract complex rational deliberations can be performed by control systems of robots, while processing huge amounts of input data. Therefore the initiation of physical causal chains may be traced back to almost platonically sounding reasons emulated in software structures. So, all things considered there is at least a strong affinity between the concepts of “cause” and “reason”.

⁵⁷ cf. The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version/Second Catholic Edition, Ignatius Press: San Francisco 2006:

back to former lives; manipulations from other spheres of reality (such as in the case of brains in a vat); etc. etc. – or a willing has at least sometimes within a certain range of options no reason or cause. Then it is purely stochastic within that scope and the actor (partly) a random generator. However, the influence of chance, which at the metaphysical extreme may only exist in form of an altogether contingent deterministic world, can not be completely eliminated from the formation of our will. On the other hand, it hardly can be denied that our actions are at least partly determined by what has happened to us so far in our life. Therefore we may well say that ultimately we are motivated by a combination of "chance and necessity".⁵⁸ Whether there exist certain

Rom. 9, 14–24.

⁵⁸ An ironic but delightful allusion to: Monod, Jacques; *Chance and necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, Vintage Books A Division of Random House: New York 1972. A soul, a Cartesian „res cogitans“ or whatever, which perhaps only very rarely decided in a way, completely independent from any influences, within a narrow range between almost infinitesimally differing options, in my opinion would quasi act as a random generator thereby. The postulated dependence on diverse influences apart from a potential just mentioned restricted fortuitousness does not imply a denial of the possibility of rational reasoning. On the contrary this would be endangered by unrestricted arbitrariness. By analogy the output of a numerical sequence produced by a computer

discrete absolutely fortuitous events in the realm of quantum mechanics or the unpredictability of quantum phenomena, with which scientists are consistently confronted in experiments, results from innumerable influences by entanglements etc., so that an individual particle is practically determined by the state of the entire universe⁵⁹ or something completely different is behind the observed phenomena – no matter, what is metaphysically true in this context, a fundamental randomness of reality as a whole can not be denied. Regardless of whether the apparent phenomenal world originates from God or any other concealed actual reality or plain naturalism comes near to the truth, everything appears to us in such a way as it appears to us, because everything (possibly including a divine entity) is just as it is. Perhaps, there are several levels between the "apparent" and the "ultimate" reality, but in the end everything emerged if not from a multiple then at least from single ungrounded and uncaused coincidence. This

calculating the irrational transcendental number π surely is determined by the electrical processes in the machine's black box, but provided a correct implementation of an adequate algorithm it also follows abstract mathematical rules.

⁵⁹ The "delayed-choice entanglement swapping", mentioned in footnote 56, could be explained by this means. But as remarked in that footnote, I tend to the apprehension that interpreting the results of experiments in the context of the EPR-paradox in such a manner might be completely wrong.

also applies to our entire personality and existence. The fact that our will is no exception fits well into the overall pattern of this argument. A "free will", which neither depends on some influences nor is (at least partly) stochastic, exceeds my present mental imagery. Therefore, I also consider my own inner life as part of an eventually incomprehensible reality. Admittedly, this self-understanding is also a belief in the sense of the previous chapter.

Given the biblical thesis of man as an "image" of God, these deliberations might be transferred to the "divine will". From such a perspective the difference between "creation" and "evolution" may be deemed somewhat less fundamental.

5. Practical conclusions

As discussed above I am deeply aware that sensory impressions, feelings, and thoughts, as well as desires and the resulting will, which shape my "ego", are ultimately given by a combination of "chance and necessity". Plausibly I share this circumstance with other creatures, especially with my fellow human beings. This a little bit irritating insight seriously questions a seemingly quite common view, which has been intuitively present in me before, namely that of comprehending myself and my fellows as acting in "quasi-absolutely independent way". Meditations about this topic may not only modify one's self-awareness, but

also many other attitudes altering consequently resultant volitions too. This leads to reflections, which only can be brought to temporary inner consistency by means of repeated (iterative) loops. That a little dizzy making process is also part of the reality, which happens to me and forms me, but does not allow me to transcend it. Again some kind of circular self-reference is essential and one should not try to eliminate it. Nevertheless, existing models of spiritual traditions, psychology and sociology may help to deal with the contingent conditionality of actions and reasons.

The arising understanding of one's own existential subjection to given circumstances, which does not depend on a specific metaphysical weltanschauung as for instance a reductionist naturalism, – this understanding, just derived from a quite broad concept of causality,⁶⁰ involves the danger of a somewhat fatalistic interpretation. But as already annotated⁵⁸ my theses do not include a denial of the capability of rationality.

In my opinion the assertion that from observations of “what is the case” (i.e. a plain description) can not be concluded, “what ought to be the case or to be done” (i.e. a desire or commandment) – that assertion, known as Hume's law, is not applicable to a willing subject. Maybe, this law holds true for a stone on the moon,

⁶⁰ Perhaps I should rather say “a general interrelation”.

which seemingly does not care about anything, if at all. (Proponents of animism or panpsychism might even deny that.)

Personal aspiring "volitions", which, as discussed above, are not static or isolable from environmental influences, nonetheless seem to belong to the essence of human beings or even animals. They feature obviously something looking like intentions and in further consequence (apart from epistemic problems concerning every "normal fact") of having sensibly attributable "quasi objectively existing ambitions", which correspond to an "ought" from the subjective perspective of that beings, if we neglect the in principle non-normative epistemic problem of other minds.⁶¹

Universal aims, which are shared by "everything" or its "origins", such as platonic values or divine volitions are admittedly not recognizable at the moment, at least not in an unquestionable way.

From the subjective inner perspective not only an "ought" in the form of desires emerges from my current individual "human suchness" due to the will I am sensing in myself, but also the sensibleness of the endeavor to

⁶¹ All things considered the pragmatic assumption of other minds in everyday life seems to be the best option at the moment, because it is possibly true, and I don't think that I mentally would be able to treat those at least potentially really conscious persons properly, if I regarded them as philosophical zombies.

act in a way, which promises to be successful to the best of my knowledge. Though, it has to be considered as a little fateful, if a child ignoring mother's warnings burns its fingers at the hot stove top, and despite the fact that interests may depend on all sorts of contingent conditions, it would be quite inappropriate for a person to do more or less knowingly something stupid instead of striving to achieve, what seems to be the wisest from the most comprehensive view attainable with reasonable effort at that time. The only thing that rationally can be rejected is a retrospective brooding about one's own faults and *acrasia*,⁶² as far as no better approach for the future can be inferred from it. However, an indulgent attitude towards one's own former decisions and actions or towards other persons (concerning the past and presence), can not be an argument for acting negligently at present, since it simply would be a painful foolishness in a concrete as well as in a metaphorical sense, if somebody would touch a hot stove plate with full knowledge of the situation and prefer not to get burnt at the same time without being forced to do so because of additional extraordinary circumstances.

⁶² Perhaps intuitive emotional thinking (according to Kahneman "System 1") is a potential partial explanation of *acrasia*, which contradicts conscious rational considerations. cf. Kahneman Daniel; *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York 2011.

Admittedly, the inner stance, which might be excited by the deliberations presented here, is somehow in danger to lead into a quandary analogous to the “be spontaneous” paradox,¹ since it looks quite unfeasible to regard oneself as a coincidence of “chance and necessity” and to be actively engaged in one’s own life simultaneously in a rational manner. More amusingly the situation is described in a poem about a centipede, which could not move further, when it had started to think too much about, how it actually could run with its numerous legs.⁶³

In this context we may get some vague clues from the Buddhist concept of “emptiness” (shunyata) and Zen practice. But in my opinion these traditions teach quite a lot irrational nonsense too.⁶⁴ Especially I would like to warn against the idea of awaking or becoming enlightened in the sense of getting a direct intuitive access to the “true reality”, what is completely opposite to my agnostic approach.⁶⁵ From the Buddha’s teaching

⁶³ cf. Poem about a centipede in: Watts, Alan W.; *The Way of Zen*, Pantheon Books Inc.: New York 1957.

⁶⁴ cf. my critique in chapter 6.

⁶⁵ At this point I would like to recall that I was a fundamentalist Christian for quite a long period, in which I was “blessed” with ecstatic mystical experiences. In retrospective contemplation these incidents, which left the impression to be even more real than the rest of my life, reproducibly turned out to be auto-suggestive illusions.

I only value certain aspects concerning the insight to the impermanence and conditionality of everything including our own personhood, as this agrees with my experiences, and some of the recommendations, how we might deal with that realization in a calm and mindful way.

The fundamental considerations about the dependence of the is/ought-interrelation on the existence of willing subjects can also be applied to ethical attitudes. In a certain sense, therefore, ethical views are just as prejudiced hypotheses as all other theses, except that in addition to expectations with regard to the external world, "inner impressions" such as fears, preferences, desires, etc. and their evaluation (i.e. an internal processing or classification on a Meta level) must be taken into account. Therefore, contrary to Hume's view, normative conclusions may be attributed directly to exactly the same intellect, which also processes purely descriptive "external world affairs". (This might be a reason, why it is so difficult to work scientifically in a real axiologically neutral manner.)

However, because of those additional "inner" parts, moral appeals are still bound to a much greater extent by a subjective perspective, and therefore must even more credibly take into account the presumed attitudes and interests of the addressees in order to be

acceptable to them.⁶⁶ It is possible to legitimize a society's norm or law by the well-balanced rationally scrutinized interests of the majority of a population, which then essentially results from the momentary "suchness" of those people. Notwithstanding that substantial foundation, such a norm or law might be in a violent contrast to real quasi objective interests of a minority. Besides, like every just describing hypothesis, a norm or law is inevitably also subject to the possibility of errors with respect to all presuppositions and expectations (including notions concerning human nature), on which it is founded.⁶⁷

If "will" is not considered to be "absolute" anymore, a metaphysical conception of guilt, which seemed so important to many religions, is actually untenable. In a modern secular democracy punishments in the course of criminal justice, therefore, can only be vindicated by

⁶⁶ cf. Jacobs, Jonathan; Dimensions of Moral Theory, Blackwell Publishers Ltd.: Malden/Oxford 2002.

⁶⁷ Hans Albert also attempted to bridge the gap between a purely descriptive science and rational norms of action by "bridge-principles". (cf. Albert, Hans; Treatise on Critical Reason, Princeton University Press: Princeton, New Jersey 1985.) In case of conflicts often, even if everyone agrees about the hard objective facts, there is no compelling clear transition to, what should be or should be done. Presumably, this observation is the actual reason behind the mostly overstressed thesis of the so-called "naturalistic fallacy".

special and general prevention or a compulsory active participation of perpetrators in reparations in favor of aggrieved parties. Despite their legitimacy these penalties do have a certain "character of destiny" just like many other things in life. This also applies to the reactions of fellow human beings triggered by emotions such as compassion, a sense of fairness, but also envy, craving for revenge, etc., which habitually also influence the judiciary. Those innate sentiments presumably act as "social regulators" in order to promote a behavior beneficial to the community's welfare and moderate the effects of undoubtedly given individual differences in wit and shrewdness.⁶⁸ Besides language and various other common features of humans, their existence is an evidence that we are designed to live together with our equals to quite a great extent.⁶⁹ Hence most people are only truly happy, if they succeed in an amicable social coexistence with others, while overly egoistic satisfactions leave a bad taste in conscience.

In pursuit of social harmony a community is doing well to grant a certain degree of advantages to the more talented, more industrious or otherwise more successful

⁶⁸ The trouble is that these instincts are not sufficient in modern anonymous mass societies.

⁶⁹ For a neuroscientific argumentation cf. Rizzolatti, Giacomo; Sinigaglia, Corrado; *Mirrors in the Brain: How Our Minds Share Actions, Emotions, and Experience*, University Press Inc.: Oxford/New York 2008.

individuals, because potentially all members benefit from their achievements. But the same community should also set them limits in the public interest of avoiding disequilibrium and exploitations. A surely questionable biologicistic argumentation might propound that by protecting some opportunities for those disadvantaged, who are less successful at the moment, a "diversity" within human culture is preserved, what could be beneficial for new unforeseeable challenges in future. Like all of us, I am a part of society, who might quasi overnight be exposed to unexpected adversity and be deprived from any chance to help myself. A democracy with checks and balances, which limits the arbitrariness of at least momentarily fitter, more assertive fellows, is a kind of insurance for maintaining a certain respect for my basic human needs and dignity. This is a very good and important reason to support personally a general consensus on a sacrosanct binding nature of human rights.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Although, at the moment I do not believe in the perceptibility of an unalterable eternal natural law, I think that sensible beings with a human nature should tenaciously stick to the unprecedented achievement, the declaration of human rights constitutes (cf. United Nations; International Bill of Human Rights: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly, 183rd plenary meeting, Resolution A/RES/217: Paris Dec. 10th, 1948). Consisting of willing subjects, these rights can rationally be defended by a majority of humans using

Moreover, personal considerations offer excellent arguments for a solidly united welfare state, which provides support in case of calamities, poverty, unemployment, and disease as well as in old age, but also ensures fair educational and economic opportunities for everybody.

The uncertainty about whether my current actions may have serious consequences at some time or other, for example after death (in an afterlife in a different world or after a rebirth etc.) – this fundamental existential unpredictability of future could perhaps create an additional motivation, mostly to behave truly conscientiously to the best of my knowledge at that moment. Even if I were wrong, I can at least say to myself that I acted in good faith. Everything else is beyond my current means.

Therefore, a critical belief, which is incessantly scrutinized by experience, but nonetheless accompanied by an awareness of its own uncertain character, is a thoroughly rational attitude. In contrast to normal religious faith, which pretends to know more than a genuine truthfulness would allow, my belief even urges me to confess my fundamental ignorance frankly and, in the meantime, only to make assumptions, insofar as they are indispensable for acting responsibly under such

arguments referring to their carefully hypothesized current, albeit possibly “evolutionarily” ephemeral nature.

circumstances. This approach prevents me from conducting my life crookedly on the basis of completely unsecured assumptions (of religious, metaphysical, or other philosophical-speculative kind). However, as a consequence, not a methodological atheism should prevail in science, as manifold alleged hitherto, but an agnosticism, which at least in principle includes all metaphysics. As already discussed, serious science should always be aware that all models, hypotheses or theories are quasi prejudices because of their necessarily provisional, error-prone character, and therefore must be critically questioned on the basis of empiric trials. Metaphysical assumptions should be used as sparingly as possible, but according to my experience it is impossible to get along completely without them. Indeed, but some theories of cosmology, biology, and physics as well as other sciences with quite speculative inclinations resemble much more religious interpretations of the world than hypotheses, which have been tested rigorously and proved beneficial in everyday life, although, concededly there is a seamless transition between the extremes. Therefore, as already mentioned, alternative conceptions should always be taken into account, and in everyday practice an approach should be preferred, which depends the least on merely conjectured assumptions or considers imponderables the most.⁵³ This also applies to fundamental decisions in personal life and not least in the religious sphere.

6. Religion

My belief that even theses, quit directly derived from experience, are only preliminary assumptions, forms the basis for a humble spirituality of openness to innumerable different transcendental possibilities. For the sake of truthfulness, such an attitude attempts to recognize the limits of knowledge, which are always in question themselves, pragmatically combined with the hope that reality ultimately is somehow acceptable and that there is a salvific path for living truly decently as honest seeker.

Anyway, a critical agnostic must not be indifferent to other convictions. Although my own view might be possibly wrong, this does not mean that I have to regard other unfounded or at least insufficiently justified religious or whatever speculative creeds as equivalent to mine. I can ask those, who disagree with me, to present their opinion with clear arguments. If these do not look plausible to me, in the light of my experience of life, or are even objectionable in some respects, I feel vindicated, perhaps even morally obliged, to try to give those dissenters an understanding of my position, unless other ethical considerations at least temporarily prevent me from doing so.

For the critical discussion of a relatively abstract philosophical concept of God, I would like to refer to a

book by John Leslie Mackie,⁷¹ although I do not agree with some of his arguments.

Today I am quite dissociated from Christianity. The Old Testament shows a brutal ethnic ideology with a god behaving like a patriarchal oriental potentate. In the Torah, the "holiest" part of Scripture from a Jewish point of view, Moses and or even God in person repeatedly mandates a genocide with the explicit extermination of captives, including women, male children, and old men. I don't want to go into the details of the partly insane cruelty of Jewish law, neither to descant on the intolerant, jealous and vindictive tyrannical god, portrayed by the prophets and elsewhere in the bible.⁷²

Even the allegedly merciful loving heavenly Father proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth did not prevent him from enforcing his moral appeals by massive, sometimes

⁷¹ Mackie, John Leslie; *The Miracle of Theism*, Oxford University Press Inc.: Oxford/New York 1982. The book is focused on monotheism and scarcely deals with polytheistic systems, which also might be philosophically discussed in an abstract manner nonetheless. Besides, what "a priori" justifies the exclusion of gods or demons, who are morally indifferent, partly immoral or even evil? What about divine entities, who are not omniscient or omnipotent? Therefore a denial of successful theodicy is not really a sufficing argument in support of atheism.

⁷² cf. Ehrman, Bart D.; *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer*, HarperOne, HarperCollins Publishers: New York 2009.

grotesque, threats (e.g. punishments in form of never ending tortures). On balance, the doctrine of Jesus does not really convince me. Besides some truly inspiring wise teachings and many trivialities, it contains several sentiments, which I sincerely disapprove.⁷³ Though its authenticity is fairly questionable, tradition casts a rather poor light on the averred deity of Jesus. The Gospels contain a lot of miraculous narrations, which according to my estimation, since they are totally unverifiable, rather in contrast to my own life's experience; do not contribute to the legitimation of Christ's claims. Moreover miracles are also reported in many other, partly contradictory traditions. So owing to my agnostic principles I, of course, do not apodictically exclude the possibility of Christ's resurrection in the flesh but regard this pronouncement of a historically unique happening as highly unlikely after carefully weighing the pros and cons. In contrast to this, due to a noticeable pessimistic trait I fear that death might not be the definite end, a real rest in unconscious peace.

The "fruits" of Christianity handed down in the course of about 2000 years also do not consistently speak in favor

⁷³ cf. e.g. The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version/Second Catholic Edition, Ignatius Press: San Francisco 2006: Mt 5, 17–20; Mt 5, 27–32; Mt 19, 3–12; Mt 21, 18–22; Mt 25, 14–30; Mk 3, 20–30; Mk 4, 10–12; Mk 10, 2–12; Lk 6, 43–45; Lk 10, 10–16; Lk 13, 23–28; Lk 16, 16–31; Jn 8, 12–59; Jn 20, 24–29.

of the somehow anachronistic myth-enshrouded religion⁷⁴ with its personality cult of Jesus, which looks exaggerated, even in comparison to many sectarian movements of modern gurus. In God's position, I would feel embarrassed by the flatteries in the psalms, in the rest of the Bible, and in many prayers of the Church. Although I am admittedly perhaps lacking the necessary insight, I think that a true God should not need such fooling around. Some allege that the practice of devotion actually serves the believers themselves in order to attain a mature wisdom, but are orthodox bigots indeed better than humbly doubting agnostic? Even worse Jesus and his heavenly Father purportedly tend to feel offended quite swiftly by non-worshipping infidels and threat them with severe punishments, if they do not belief in tenets, which in all probability could be eminently wrong as well from an honest human perspective.⁷⁵ The quasi blind faith required in the

⁷⁴ cf. e.g. MacCulloch, Diarmaid; *A History of Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years*, Allen Lane an imprint of Penguin Books Ltd.: London 2009. or Haught, James A.; *Holy Horrors: An Illustrated History of Religious Murder and Madness*, Prometheus Books: Buffalo, New York 1990.

⁷⁵ The famous sin beyond forgiveness, the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, is mentioned in the historically oldest gospel according to Mark in an interesting context. At Mk 3, 20–21 we read, that the relatives of Jesus doubt, whether he might be insane. Then follows a passage (Mk 3, 22–30), in which Jesus

New Testament is incompatible with my current understanding of truthfulness and therefore in my opinion, strictly speaking, unethical!⁷⁶

From what I can tell, Islam to the core looks like a patchwork of Jewish, Christian and old-Arabian fragments, created by the alleged "prophet" Mohammed.⁷⁷ Until today Islamic communities preserved more than a few elements in teaching and practice, which I exceedingly detest, as for instance the tradition of holy war or an especially severe discrimination of women. Of course, there are also positive things like the avoidance of intoxicants such as alcohol or some aspects of the Sufi mysticism.⁷⁸

defends himself against scribes, who question the origin of his "inspirations", and threatens them, that such a "blasphemy" will never be forgiven. In the next part (Mk 3, 31–34) it becomes clear, that even his mother is among those, who are not sure about his mental health, and Jesus rebuffs her and his brothers quite brusquely.

⁷⁶ If religions, as unfortunately most of them do, stipulate an uncritical acceptance of convictions about insufficiently justified speculations, this is strong evidence against them to my mind. What a spirituality that abandons the integrity of heart, not merely out of consideration for our weakness, but promoting this flaw as a virtue? What a wretched divine authority demanding such dishonesty?

⁷⁷ cf. The Qur'an: A new translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Oxford University Press Inc., New York 2004/2005.

⁷⁸ cf. e.g.: Shah, Idries; The World of the Sufi, Octagon Press

I regard Hinduism (or better the variety of Hindu-denominations) as bundle of doctrines based on a mythology, which to a certain extend still serves the upper classes of India to maintain their social claims by the caste system. But, of course, valuable aspects should not be concealed, such as methods like yoga or philosophical reflections, as contained in the Upanishads or in Vedanta traditions, which offer propositions for manifold further explanations of reality, just as the doctrine of reincarnation provides a possible alternative to complete annihilation of consciousness in death or an afterlife in a different world.⁷⁹

Not only in face of the belief in karma and rebirth, though impaired by the doctrine of “anatta” (non-self), I deem the thesis untenable that Buddhism is rather a philosophy than a religion. The alleged deliverance from suffering by renunciation of all desires seems to me impossible in the proposed radicalness, namely as a “remainderless fading away and cessation of craving” (cf. 3rd noble truth),²⁸ because longing for that cessation is paradoxically a craving itself.⁸⁰ (The strange attempts of Zen Buddhist traditions to circumvent paradoxes do

Ltd.: London 2004.

⁷⁹ Muesse, Mark W.; *The Hindu Traditions: A Concise Introduction*, Fortress Press: Minneapolis 2011.

⁸⁰ cf. Webster, David; *The Philosophy of Desire in the Buddhist Pali Canon*, RoutledgeCurzon: Abingdon, Oxfordshire 2005.

not give me the impression of genuine sincerity.⁸¹) Nonetheless, I appreciate the Buddhist endeavor, to question the incessant cravings, which usually rekindle immediately after only short periods of contentment, if ever. In this context, some meditation techniques and other exercises may offer valuable elements for the

⁸¹ cf. Binder, Alfred; *Mythos Zen*, Alibri Verlag: Aschaffenburg 2009. (Unfortunately the quite readable German book contains passages, which tend to the 19th century materialism, I already criticized repeatedly.) Binder cites in his book Brian Victoria, who discussed the involvement of Zen-Buddhism in Japanese Militarism during the Second World War. cf. Victoria, Brian Daizen; *Zen at War*, 2nd ed., Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: Lanham, Maryland 2006. Binder points out, that this was the consistent result of a long-term development starting from several aspects of the Zen-tradition, of which for example the Hagakure was only one bad manifestation. However, the German book contains a critique going far beyond that. Experiences of non-duality etc., which are supposed to transcend ordinary logic, may not reflect the reality as it is, but may only be based on psychological phenomena, which are induced by some techniques. The ostensible direct contact with reality by so-called enlightened masters therefore might be only illusionary. Binder generally criticizes mystic claims of truth, but also philosophical opinions like idealism not to mention phenomenism. He advocates a rather naïve indirect materialistic realism. Precisely because many of his objections against often very apodictically held Buddhist worldviews are justified to some extent, Binder's own small mindedness in this context is quite incomprehensible to me.

journey of life. In addition, I prefer the emphasis on compassion in ethics, because I have an issue with the concept of love, which dominates in Christianity, since the latter seems to muddle up miscellaneous items in an unclear way. (Even in long-term intimate partnerships, the concept of love often leads to strange confusions of sympathetic care for the other and possessive manipulations in order to satisfy one's own emotional needs, including, for example, a demand of comfort. An honest breakdown of these aspects while avoiding the infelicitous word "love" might perhaps simplify a consciously fair compromise in the design of a relationship.)

The doctrine of emptiness (*sunyata*) is an interesting idea in view of the quantum-physical experiments on particle entanglement.²⁴ As already mentioned, Buddhist ideas concerning an illusive nature of the "I" or "self" are at least not completely alien to me. But the claim that someone in this temporal world has irrevocably reached full enlightenment in the sense of an unsurpassable and undetachable understanding of reality looks rather suspect to me, precisely because of the impermanence, which the Buddha emphasized otherwise. Even placidity and inner peace achieved during years of practice is undeniably never secure from loss in this life, may it be caused by dementia such as Alzheimer's or other neurological and psychological disorders, not to mention

unfortunate head injuries.⁸² It is also uncertain whether anything attained here still helps beyond the death. To avoid misunderstandings, I do not want to question the value of a meditative way of life per se, but only an exaggerated hope that a definite self-redemption can be achieved by it with certainty. Therefore, I consider the critical attitude of Stephen Batchelor as insufficient, and I am far from understanding myself as a Buddhist in his diluted sense.⁸³ Although in many respects I feel closer to Buddhist than Christian views, I tend to believe that a "salvation" is not a personal accomplishment, but a gift to me from whom or whatsoever, ultimately without any reason. Remember that I already stated to regard my own volitions in a similar manner.

"Esoteric trends" often assure to originate from oriental besides occult and other western traditions, but are in my opinion most commonly deeply rooted in the consumption craze of modern society.

Frequently under the guise of spirituality the widespread strategies for dulling of an event culture, which pursues the incessant generation of sensations by media, travelling, drugs, etc., are just continued. I would like to

⁸² cf. Kalat, James W.; *Biological Psychology*, 10th ed., Wadsworth, Cengage Learning: Belmont, California 2009.

⁸³ Batchelor, Stephen; *Buddhism Without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening*, Riverhead Books: New York 1998.

single out music in this context, since has become a plague already because of its omnipresence. In former times it might have been a luxury, but nowadays in many parts of the world silence largely has become a privilege of wealthy people, who can afford the option of withdrawing from noise and obtruded tapestries of sound. However, many people do not tolerate longer periods of complete quiet without becoming fidgety and confound “meditational music” with it. Not only in terms of environmental aspects there is hardly a difference between those, who are always going to pilgrimage to “inspiring” places, masters or events, and the mainstream, who indulge in the “normal” travelling mania. Those not finding spiritual orientation in a reasonable proximity to the usual centers of their lives, will scarcely find it in the distance.

My reflexions, surely being too mundane in the eyes of the public, are focused on a discerningly mindful contact with the ordinary non-special self-revealing reality. Together with sufficient time of rest this forms the basis for an attitude adequate to the ideas presented in this text. The preference for secular affairs certainly results from a profound disappointment concerning the putatively only relevant sacred sphere.

Needless to say that I cannot rule out to be wrong about my agnostic belief and will regret this later, but at the moment I do not see any honest, sensible way of simply joining a religious tradition without actually “sinning”

against veraciousness. Besides, which one should I choose – Christianity, just because I have been quasi born into it? If Jesus really were the Son of God, and would condemn me in the last judgment precisely because of leading my life in accordance with the true conviction of religious uncertainty as the decisive reason, then showing such a lack of respect for truthfulness I would regard him also capable of cheating truly devout Christians.

In his famous considerations about a religious wager Blaise Pascal⁸⁴ simply proposed to bet on the existence of a God in the sense of Christian, actually Catholic faith, because there is an eternal bliss to gain but little to lose in doing so. This argumentation contains many presuppositions. If one considers further options, like for instance a God, who abhors hypocritical gamblers and prefers modest veracious agnostics, the betting argument collapses like a house of cards.^{71,85} Does an insincere or irrational believer actually have more reason to trust in reality than a honest "unbeliever"?⁸⁶ Nobody is safe from an arbitrary divine authority, so I prefer to remain faithful to my true conviction. Then I still can say

⁸⁴ cf. Article about "Pascal's Wager" at <https://en.wikipedia.org>.

⁸⁵ cf. e.g. Martin, Michael; *Atheisms: A Philosophical Justification*, Temple University Press: Philadelphia 1990.

⁸⁶ cf. Küng, Hans; *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*, Doubleday & Company, Inc.: Garden City/New York 1980.

to myself that I had formerly decided according to the best of my judgment and ability at that time, even if I were mistaken. At present there are a lot of indications that all religions I know are at least as wrong as a naïve atheism. Therefore my "belief" is not to be understood as a "neutral" attitude.⁸⁷

7. Living with an agnostic belief

It would be nice if groups would congregate, in which the belief in the fundamental ignorance about the mystery behind the manifesting phenomenal reality could be further contemplated and moreover implemented in new spiritual forms. My personal preferences lean towards a religious community or, perhaps, better towards a

⁸⁷ The conception presented here, is unfortunately even less cozy than that of Monod's "gypsy on the boundary of an alien world" (Monod, Jacques; *Chance and necessity An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, Vintage Books A Division of Random House: New York 1972.), who is at least firmly convinced of being released from all possible misery by an eternal dreamless sleep. Since I share the Buddha's view that a fundamental proneness to suffering inheres in all living beings and I do not trust a potential creator of this present world to be able to create a perpetual truly happy one in the future, I prefer a definite "expiration" of the vital spark to any kind of continued existence, not to speak of a rebirth into this "valley of tears". However, my "faith" gives me no reassuring certainty, ergo just hope remains.

philosophical school, which cultivates an attentive, experience-orientated comprehensive agnosticism. Although meditation should form an important practical element, in contrast to Buddhism it would not be concerned with the pursuit of "enlightenment," but with the modest attempt to find an at least tentatively satisfactory inner attitude towards oneself, others, and the "world". Like in serious science, carefully pondered aggregated overall experience should constitute the fundament of that belief, which should never be understood as a kind of "knowledge" even though. This does not mean that valuable inspirations might not be adopted from various fanciful eccentric ideas. However, like all (including so-called scientific) proposals they must prove themselves, but at best escape rejection and just retain their provisional hypothetical character.

The program of such philosophical associations should also include a social commitment concerning the implementation of a sustainable lifestyle and an ethics of compassion. This implies, for example, a deliberate renunciation of unnecessary consumption, which is often just induced by a better sooner than later abolished advertising propaganda or based on an irrational mimetic desire.⁸⁸ To be able to stop the systematical throwaway practice we need an insistent demand for

⁸⁸ cf. Palaver, Wolfgang; René Girard's Mimetic Theory, Michigan State University Press: East Lansing 2013.

better repairable and recyclable durable consumer goods and a massive campaign against planned obsolescence, which partly in quite subtle form compromises almost all economic supply chains including the B2B-sector.⁸⁹ Another waste of resources concerns the food sector, where large amounts of partly even insalubrious products from a worldwide operating agribusiness and subsequent processing industry are dumped on the market. While a reckless exploitation creates massive irreparable “collateral” damages, a non-negligible proportion of the output just ends up in the trash. Therefore nourishment should not be judged only in terms of preventive health care but also in respect of issues concerning ecology, social equity and animal welfare. Local seasonal fruit and vegetables from organic agriculture and a frugal consumption of animal source products from species-appropriate farming should be preferred, besides some fair trade product from abroad.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ cf. Article about “Planned obsolescence” at <https://en.wikipedia.org>. My knowledge is chiefly based on German literature about and personal insight into this topic.

⁹⁰ My information mostly stems from German literature, but there is more than enough material available in English. So nobody has an excuse not to know about the problems or strictly speaking has enough reasons to belief veraciously in justified moral obligations.

In the socio-political area, which is vital to our well-being, I sorely miss seminal innovations as a complement to science and engineering. Without accompanying advances in mental and social matters we humans will most probably destroy our own livelihood in the mania of a senseless voracity, while achieving only a comparatively modest quality of life despite an enormous consumption of resources.⁹¹

As a somewhat exotic dubious prototype from the realm of pedagogy, I would like to cite “the continuum concept” of Jean Liedloff.⁹² The very idyllic unrealistic sounding observations⁹³ described by the autodidactic ethnologist

⁹¹ cf. Helliwell, J., Layard, R., & Sachs, J.; World Happiness Report 2017, Sustainable Development Solutions Network: New York 2017. (<http://worldhappiness.report/>)

⁹² Liedloff, Jean; *The Continuum Concept: In Search Of Happiness Lost*, The Perseus Books Group: Cambridge, Massachusetts 1985. The chosen example signifies that even theories, which arose in a very questionable manner, may well be justified, if and thus far they prove themselves. Therein I agree with Popper. At the end of Section 3 I had serious problems to vindicate my epistemological position, which contain some “inductive elements”. Just as practiced by Liedloff or some constructivists in their argumentation, I might have resorted to an “evolutionist myth” by concluding from a human tendency to “inductive generalizations” that this practice is justified by an “evolutionary advantage”, which “obviously” helped men to survive. But I refused to do so with good reason.

⁹³ cf. Edgerton, Robert B.; *Sick Societies: Challenging the Myth*

are accompanied by a somewhat mythical appearing “evolutionary” interpretation. However, if accurately designed empirical studies with small children, who are grown up in the way Liedloff proposed, but are comparable to other children otherwise, actually display the prognosticated positive effects in respect of their general happiness with sufficient statistical significance,⁹⁴ there is no reason not to include her suggestions tentatively into educational recommendations. However, it also would be necessary to examine painstakingly, which elements really matter and prove beneficial in the long run.

In gender relations both sides would probably benefit from a reduction in expectations. Not only romantic myths and improper role models propagated by media, with which in addition cosmetics and fashion industries profiteer,⁹⁵ seem to be rather detrimental for a satisfying coexistence, but also feminist ideals can challenge it, since those sometimes contain quite contradictory

of Primitive Harmony, The Free Press A Division of Simon & Schuster Inc.: New York 1992.

⁹⁴ For the philosophical pitfalls concerning statistics cf. Bandyopadhyay, Prasanta S.; Forster, Malcolm R.; *Philosophy of Statistics*, North Holland, Elsevier B.V.: Oxford/Amsterdam/Burlington 2011.

⁹⁵ Recommendation: Freedman, Rita; *Beauty Bound*, Lexington Books, D. C. Heath and Company: Lexington, Massachusetts 1986.

pipe dreams, incompatible with a realistic view of the (male and female) human condition. If there exist any plausible examples for good partnerships at all, then those older couples, who in spite of all the foibles and oppositenesses seem to be able to accept one another in a fair bilaterally symmetric way, what certainly only applies to extremely rare cases. Although I think that today partnerships are often abandoned too easily, and couple therapies or other assisting aid should be supported by society, even a failure of long-term relationships cannot be ruled out. In some cases a divorce is simply the lesser evil, and then, contrary to Jesus of Nazareth, I deem humanly acceptable regulations for it necessary.

Since so many utopias suffered shipwreck a particularly cautious attitude, constantly ready for revisions, is indicated for sociopolitical issues. Nevertheless, I firmly believe that, for example, a more socially acceptable economic system is possible. In order to regain leeway for a democratically legitimate policy a currently quite pervasive plutocracy must be stopped by means of rigorous antitrust laws, an exponentially progressive taxation of property and a strict absolute limit for the accumulation of wealth and therewith associated power. A strategy of "division and rule" is essential in this context for the survival of democracy, since it otherwise

will be stifled by corruption⁹⁶ and an overwhelming influence of lobbyists financed from partly non-transparent sources.

Blatant injustice is the hallmark of current world trade with raw materials as well as with manufactured goods. The exploitation of environment and people in disadvantaged regions will sooner or later also harm the majority of the population in developed rich countries, since it causes a social race to the bottom for competitive reasons in addition to wars on resources. Only a small diverse global elite, in terms of numbers just a few millions worldwide, comprising such different groups like aristocrats, industrialist families, parvenus in new economy, mafiosos, oligarchs in the former Soviet bloc countries, oil sheiks, some dictators and their minions, top-ranking members of the Chinese communist party, etc. will profiteer in the end.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Nowadays there exist many legal forms. Just think about quite common lucrative job offers to politicians after their career. Isn't it fairly conceivable that merely such prospects affect them in a corrupting manner already while being in office?

⁹⁷ By no means should this connote something like a unitedly operating conspiracy. On the contrary, obviously there are shifting coalitions fighting against each other. They only seem to share the interest of exploiting the majority of mankind without any organization in behind, although some groups are using the WTO, the World Economic Forum, the European Round Table of Industrialists etc. for lobbying.

Instead of further pursuing free-trade ideology, which boosts the law of the jungle at its worst within economy, the European Union should stepwise establish uniform high ethical social and ecological minimum standards for all products and services traded within the so-called European Single Market, no matter whether they were produced inside or outside the Union.⁹⁸ The Europeans can not force China or other big players to respect environmental concerns, or employees' and human rights in general, but in turn others should not be allowed to sell goods and services on the European market, that contradict our values frequently invoked in hypocritical speeches. This is not to be understood as a promotion of protectionism, on the contrary the rules should be explicitly formulated in a way so that European exploitations are stopped and really fair terms of trade are implemented. Sufficient control of compliance on the macroeconomic scale could be gained by random

⁹⁸ In addition to legal minimum regulations Europe-wide acting trade unions should fight for a fairly balanced equalization of wages for all employees of companies active on the so-called Single Market. On the long run this should more and more strictly expanded to all participants of supply chains, irrespective of their location. An African mineworker providing us directly or indirectly with precious raw material should live as good as a German miner. As everybody can see, that would only be affordable, if we reduced our demand. This is another reason for my insistence on ending planned obsolescence.

sampling and a whistle-blower system, which facilitates the denunciation of rogue companies among international competitors.

Since average people display both, altruistically social and recklessly selfish features, whose dominance is subject to temporal fluctuations, not to mention the variability within the population, certain rules enforced by the community are indispensable, all the more, as there are smarter and less clever individuals. Even sometimes glorified societies without money, are applying social mechanisms or, more drastically formulated, leverages, which promote behaviors beneficial to commonweal and sanction all those too detrimental to the community.

In all areas concerning the protection of employees or consumers, education, health care, the old-age pension scheme, etc. polity should always take care that cunning individual actors do not disproportionately fleece others, thus ensuring at least a certain minimum of the fundamental equality of all people with regard to justice and dignity. After all, nobody knows, whether he or she will not need such support tomorrow.⁹⁹ As proved by

⁹⁹ Moreover, a lack of public health care and old-age pension funded by societal solidarity induces an increased desire for a high number of children to secure family support and sustenance in lieu of it. Therefore not only the individual's well-being depends on the global establishment of social institutions for a solidary reduction of personal risks in life, but the survival of mankind at all. If social security is kept being denied to a

sufficient evidence in history we can not rely on a mysterious "invisible hand". Rather, a society's majority possibly assisted by democratically legitimated politicians¹⁰⁰ must continually adapt the rules in economy and elsewhere guided by experience, in order to counteract undesirable developments.

The construction of serious alternatives to the unsustainable present political and economic system would require some arduous efforts in the fashion of scientific strategies, which always attempt to prove new hypotheses on hard empirical findings.¹⁰¹ First of all, visionary models have to be reformulated in concrete bills and subjected to an in-depth controversial interdisciplinary discussion (not least at university level

large part of humanity, the world population will continue to grow until it collapses by the means of resource wars and other disasters. A certain degree of prosperity empirically has proven to be a human means of reducing the birth rate.

¹⁰⁰ I am in favor of direct democracy similar to Switzerland, but prior to its implementation a real democratic, low-threshold and equally fair access to media enabling a well-balanced debate should be guaranteed. Nowadays plebiscites are too much susceptible to manipulations by influential wealthy minorities.

¹⁰¹ The failure of the so-called counterculture of the 1960s till mid-1970s should be a warning. That "culture" was characterized by irrational romantic illusions, drugs and inconsistencies. Thus it laid the foundation of the later triumph of neoliberalism, which in contrast to its name is just about to destroy most people's liberty.

involving experts of economics and jurisprudence, but also sociology, psychology, etc.). Only after a refinement by such a debate, which should raise numerous arguments pro and contra alternatives and details, the resulting improved drafts could be a reasonable basis for decisions by the constituents or a "convent of representatives". Even then, of course, it is not guaranteed that there will no massive mistakes, which need to be revised soon.

The vigilant critically questioning way of life, presented here, is also essential for the preservation of freedom, in the sense of an emancipatory assertion against unfair manipulations by somebody else's "will". Liberty forms the basis and one aim of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.¹⁰² The discussions about the contradictory metaphysical "free will" distracts from such a meaningful concept of freedom, which might be jeopardized by an abuse of neuroscientific research results, as well.

As a critical agnostic, I am pretty aware of the questionableness of each position. In contrast to the practice of Pyrrhonian skeptics, I am not "indifferent" to all points of view. I believe that it perhaps might make a difference, in which way I am living. That's why I am

¹⁰² United Nations; International Bill of Human Rights: Universal Declaration of Human Rights, General Assembly, 183rd plenary meeting, Resolution A/RES/217: Paris Dec. 10th, 1948.

striving for attitude, which looks adequate in a comprehensive view of the apparent phenomenal reality. The corresponding mentality I called veraciousness. It significantly differs from a cynicism in the cloak of a lackadaisical relativism prevailing among skeptics.

Nevertheless, my approach stands in the tradition of ancient skepticism. In a way I have carried it to the extreme, by deliberately abandoning a quasi unquestionable axiomatical skeptical method in favor of a mode of action based on nothing else than mere belief, which is always at least somewhat precarious. The adoption of believing is a heresy against pure skepticism, but not my only one, since I am allowing myself, not to remain persistently in an impartial middle between different convictions, which is impossible anyway, because the absolutely neutral position often does not exist. So I am forming provisional opinions ("hypotheses", or more sharply expressed "prejudices") about a seemingly revealing world based on my current overall impression. In the face of the unfeasibility of a complete indecisive inactivity, since even just loitering might be a fatal action, I regard this simply as a necessity of life.

I hope that this portrayal of my struggle for a viable form of life, in spite of all the shortcomings, stimulates others in a way, which in turn gives encouragement back to me. Finally I would like to thank all those, who have helped me by critical feedback, not only to clarify misunder-

standings, but also to revise clear mistakes in previous editions.